CARLOS DIAZ

GRAVE MARKERS FOR UNKNOWN SOLDIERS OF WAR

DETROIT, MI 1987

RECLINING FIQURE AND APARTMENT WINDOWS

HAMTRAMCK . MI 1985

Excerpts from article by Joy Hakason Colby published in "The Detroit News". August, 1987.

Extraordinary pictures from everyday Detroit

Tucked away in Detroit's smallest Art gallery is a memorable exhibit called Unknown Monuments by photographer Carlos Diaz. The artist, who lives in Hamtramck and teaches at Detroit's Center for Creative Studies, concentrates on the Kind of ordinary Detroit landmarks we pass every day but seldom see - water towers and railroad tracks, castoff tires and peeling signs, elderly statues and old houses.

His photographs have an oddly portentous quality, as if something unsettling is about to happen. Billboards in his shots advertise such diverse products as Wonder Bread and Sylvester Stallone. In Elmwood Cementery, a bronze statue of a military man reviews snow-blanketed grave markers of unknown soldiers. A sculpture of Pope John Paul II rises above an alley loading zone in Hamtramck.

Diaz shoots his black and white images with an 8-by-10-inch view camera. But while his format may be modest and his subject matter ordinary, his images are so strong lthat they linger in the mind's eye long after one leaves the exhibition.

What's so compelling about these pictures of Detroit's underside? Why doesn't the photographer aim his camera at known monuments like the Renaissance Center or the Noguchi sculptures on the riverfront?

"That's not my kind of photograpy", Diaz explains. "I enjoy taking risks, using symbols that are minute and seemingly insignificant. I'm challenging viewers to find something in my work and in themselves as well. The message is subliminal".

Pontiac-born Diaz, who grew up in a closely knit Mexican-American family, considers Detroit to be photogenic.

"Why? Because it's been around for nearly 300 years and there are many layers of information to explore, he says.

"A few years ago, I'd photograph a decrepit house and let it be a symbol. Today, I'm not interested in portraying Detroit as a sad, defeated city. I'm an optimist, and I hope viewers leave my exhibit with upbeat feelings about this area".

Pictures like Small Factory Environment fuse Detroit's past and present. Diaz caught the atmosphere of early industry with such details as abandoned streetcar tracks, cobblestone paving and lavish growth of weeds fronting a small factory. What's remarkable is not only that the elderly factory exists but also that it's still operative.

While acknowledging that "poverty and crime can't be ignored". Diaz looks for symbols that suggest a more hopeful cycle for Detroit. He found one in a pair of signs that he composed into a picture called Construction and Destruction Markers. The image suggests a regulary recurring succession of events rather than the demolition of an aging city with problems.

This exhibit contains photographs culled from the Unknown Monument series, on which Diaz has been working for three years. White titles inscribed on wide black borders are part of the artist's concept. "Words are important. I use titles to play games with the viewer", he admits.

For instance, his Woman at Bus Stop features a figure not much larger than a speck. "People tell me they keep looking at the picture until they find the woman", Diaz says. "I want to get viewers involved with something more important than a seven-second idea conveyed by an ilustration. We tend to become numb to photography because we are confronted by so much of it".

Díaz photographed the back of the Abraham Lincoln sculpture outside the downtown public library and called it Monument to an American Forefather. "It doesn't matter that the statue represents Lincoln", he says. "It's an important individual presiding over a vista with old buildings and a new People Mover station.

Explaining why he eliminates figures in his Unknown Monuments series, Diaz says, "I had a grant for making portraits from the Michigan Council for the Arts. Photographing people became too easy. I felt that I was in a rut".

Diaz, who did his undergraduate work at he Center for Creative Studies and earned his master's degree at the University of Michigan, has become one of Detroit's most visible artist both for his own photography an for his volunteer work wit non-profit art organizations. He serves on two boards - Detroit Focus and the Urban Center for Photography.

Versión en español

Apartes dei artículo de Joy Hakason Colby publicado en el periódico "The Detroit News" Agosto, 1987.

El artista, que enseña en el Centro para Estudios Creativos de Detroit, concentra su trabajo en objetos ordinarios, los que miramos todos los días sin verlos realmente - rieles de ferrocarril, tanques de agua, estatuas ancianas y casas viejas. Sus fotografías tienen una cualidad portentosa como si algo inquietante está a punto de ocurrir. En el Cementerio Elmwood, la estatua en bronce de un hombre militar revisa lápidas de soldados desconocidos enterrados bajo la nieve. Una escultura del Papa Juan Pablo II se levanta sobre la zona de carga de un callejón.

Diaz toma sus imágenes en blanco y negro con una cámara de vista de 8 por 10. Pero si su formato es modesto y su sujeto común y corriente, sus imágenes son tan fuertes que se quedan en la mente del que los vea por un buen rato después de verlos. Qué es lo que tanto nos llama la atención de estas fotografías del lado de Detroit que llamaríamos "lo menos común". Por qué Díaz no apuntará su cámara a los monumentos famosos como El Centro Renacimiento o las esculturas de Noguchi? Explica Díaz: Eso no es mi tipo de fotografía. Gozo tomando riesgos, utilizando símbolos diminutos y aparentemente insignificantes. Estoy retando al observador a encontrar algo en mi trabajo y en sí mismo a la vez. El mensaje es subliminal.

Nacido en Pontiac, Michigan de una familia Mejicano-Americana muy unida, Díaz considera fotogénica la ciudad de Detroit. Por qué? - Porque ha existido por casi cien añoz y tiene muchas capas de información para explorar, dice él. - "Hace pocos años, tomaría una foto de una casa decrépita y la dejaría ser un símbolo. Hoy no me interesa mostrar a Detroit como una ciudad triste y vencida.

Soy optimista y ojalá el público salga de la muestra compartiendo mi emoción positiva sobre esta área del mundo". Díaz reconoce que a la pobreza y al crimen no se le puede hacer caso omiso, pero busca símbolos sugestivos de un futuro con esperanzas para la ciudad de Detroit. Uno de ellos representa para él un ciclo positivo y está implícito en la fotografía llamada "Marcadores de la Construcción y de la Destrucción". La imagen sugiere una sucesión de eventos recurrentes en vez de la demolición de una ciudad vieja y con problemas.

Esta exposición contiene una selección de fotografías de la serie "Monumentos Desconocidos", en la que Díaz ha venido trabajando desde hace tres años. Los títulos en blanco inscritos en los bordes negros de la fotografía son parte del concepto de la obra. "Las palabras son importantes, utilizo los títulos para jugar con el espectador" admite. Por ejemplo, la mujer en la parada del bus muestra una figura no mas grande que un punto la gente me dice que continúan analizando la fotografía hasta que encuentran la mujer", Díaz dice: "Quiero involucrar al observador en algo más importante que una idea de sólo siete segundos convergida en una ilustración. Díaz fotografió la parte posterior de la estatua de Abraham Lincoln afuera de la Biblioteca Central y la llamó "Monumento a un Precursor Americano". "No importa que la escultura represente a Lincoln", dice. "Es un individuo importante presidiendo una panorámica de edificios viejos y la nueva estación del metro. Al explicar el por qué eliminó las figuras en la serie "Monumentos Desconocidos", Díaz dice "Obtuve una beca del Michigan Council for the Arts para hacer retratos. Fotografiar gente se convirtió en algo muy fácil. Crei que estaba quedado".

Hoy Carlos Díaz es uno de los artistas más visibles en la ciudad de Detroit, tanto por su propia fotografía como por su trabajo como voluntario con organizaciones de arte sin ánimo de lucro. Cursó estudios en el Centro para Estudios Creativos y luego hizo trabajos de postgrado en la Universidad de Michigan. Trabaja además en dos juntas directivas de grupos de artistas en Detroit.

CARLOS DIAZ

Master de la Facultad de Artes Plásticas de la Universidad de Michigan, 1983. Además es egresado del Center for Creative Studies, Detroit, 1980. Actualmente es profesor del Center for Creative Studies, Detroit, pertenece a la Junta Directiva de Detroit Focus Gallery y es miembro de importantes asociaciones entre ellas: Society for Photographic Education, New York, N.Y., College Art Association of America, N.Y., Friends of Photography, California, Michigan Friends of Photography, Michigan. Expone desde **1979** o Detroit Focus Gallery, Detroit, Michigan. * Seleccionado para la exposición "Michigan Photography Exhibition" Scrarab Club of Detroit. * Beca Ford Foundation, Center for Creatives Studies. **1980** • "Sixty Four Portraits", Pontiac Art Center, Michigan. * Beca Rackham Graduate, University of Michigan. o "Artist we have known" 840 Gallery, Detroit. * Beca "Shool of Art of the University of Michigan". **1981** * Seleccionado "Ann Arbor Artists", Firehouse Gallery, Michigan. o "Works in Progress M.F.A.", Slusser Gallery, University of Michigan. o "First Alumni Exhibition", Center for Creative Studies, Detroit. * Beca "Shool of Art of the University of Michigan" * Beca Rackham Graduate, University of Michigan **1982** • "Two Photographers", Colby-Sawyer College, New London, N.H. * "Creative Artists Grant", Michigan Council for the Arts. o Thirty Michigan Photographers and One Texan", Looking Glass Gallery, Royal Oak, Michigan. o "The Painted Photograph", Pierce Street Gallery, Birmingham, MI. * Beca "Shool of Art of the University of Michigan". * Beca Rackham Graduate, University of Michigan **1983** • "M.F.A Show", Rackham Galleries, University of Michigan. o Cheney Cowles Museum, Spokane, Washington. o New Photographics' 83", Central Washington University, Ellensburg, WA. o "Recent Photography" Colby - Sawyer College, New London, N.H. • Photographs Among Friends", Bowling Green State University, OH. o "Sport and Leisure in America Today", The Tampa Museum, Florida. **1984** • "Photographs Among Friends", Pontiac Art Center, MI. o Comerica National Headquarters, Detroit. • Center for Creative Studies, Detroit. o "In Tandem", Pontiac Art Center, MI. o "Faculty Vision", Pierce Street Gallery, Birmingham, MI. o "20 years, 20 Artists", Pontiac Art Center, Pontiac, MI. o "Photography Faculty", Sarkis Galleries, Center for Creative Studies, Detroit. o "Sport and Leisure in America Today", The Tampa Museum, Florida **1985** o "Tigers - Baseball, Detroit Style", Michigan Gallery, Detroit. * M.C.A Grant Recipients", Michigan Gallery, Rackham Gallery University of Michigan. • "Unknown landmarks" Detroit Public Library, Michigan. o "Midwest Photography" St. Louis Community College, MO, Lindenwood College, MO. o Lloyd Gallery, Spokane, WA. * Beca "Creative Artists Grant 1985" del Michigan Council for the Arts. **1986** * "City Limits" Urban Center for photography, Detroit. o "Other Spaces" Brookfield Office Park, Farmington Hills, MI. o "New Work: Landscape" Detroit Artists Market, MI. o "Joint Ventures", U.A.W., General Motors, Human Resource Center, Auburn Hills, MI. o "New Conclusions" Paint Creek Center for the Arts, Rochester, MI; Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamzoo, MI. * Mejor fotografía "Inmortalization Exhibition", Detroit, Historical Museum, MI. * Beca "1986 Project Grant" de Arts Foundation of Michigan. * Beca "Creative Artists Grant 1985" del Michigan Council for the Arts. o Lloyd Gallery, Spokane, WA. **1987** o Urban Center for Photography, Detroit. o "New Conclusions" Paint Creek Center for the Arts, Rochester, MI; Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamzoo, MI. * Mejor fotografía "Inmortalization Exhibition", Detroit, Historical Museum, MI. **1988** * Seleccionada su obra como exposición itinerante de los Centros Colombo Americano de Colombia, S.A. Su obra se presentó además en el Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín - Colombia, S.A.

THE REMAINS OF A FIRE RAVAGED WAREHOUSE

DETROIT . MI 1984

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DETROIT. MI 1986

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CARLOS DIAZ

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ABREVIATURAS:
• *One man show* - Individuales
o *Group show* - Colectivas
* *Awards* - Distinciones

MI: Michigan
MCA: Michigan Council for the Arts
NH: New Hampshire

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El Palo No. 53-24 Medellín - Colombia, S.A.